



Town of Berwyn Heights

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MAYOR
Amanda M. Dewey

COUNCIL MEMBERS
Jodie A. Kulpa-Eddy (Mayor Pro Tem)
Christopher S. Brittan Powell
Jason W. Papanikolas
Ethan D. Sweep

Town Meeting Minutes April 14, 2021 | 7:00 pm

This meeting was held by videoconference due to the ongoing COVID-19 health emergency. The meeting was broadcast on Berwyn Heights cable TV channels and streamed on the Town website. Residents were given the opportunity to comment by telephone, Zoom, and email.

Call to Order 7:00 p.m.

Present were Mayor Amanda Dewey, Mayor Pro Tempore (MPT) Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, Councilmembers (CMs) Chris Brittan-Powell, Jason Papanikolas and Ethan Sweep. CM Brittan-Powell arrived at 7:20 p.m. Also present were Town Manager (TM) Laura Allen, Town Clerk Kerstin Harper, Lindsey & Associates Auditor Robert Diss, Historical Committee Chair Debby Steele-Snyder and Recreation Council President Susan Jones.

Pledge of Allegiance

1. Announcements

Mayor Dewey announced that Berwyn Heights received \$155,000 in bond bill funds from the State to replace the Senior Center elevator and make other repairs to the Town Center. She thanked the Town's state senator and delegates for their support. Further, all persons 16 years and older are eligible for COVID-19 vaccination and can get their shots at a new mass vaccination site at Greenbelt Station. Lastly, some students have returned to school for in-person instruction. Drivers are requested to drive carefully.

2. Approval of the Agenda

MPT Kulpa-Eddy moved, and CM Sweep seconded to approve the agenda. The agenda was approved 4 to 0. (CM Brittan-Powell had technical difficulties joining the meeting)

3. Ceremonial Items

Flood Awareness Month Proclamation: Mayor Dewey read the Proclamation observing Flood Awareness Month. CM Papanikolas moved and CM Brittan-Powell seconded to approve the Proclamation. The motion passed 5 to 0.

Arbor Day Proclamation: Mayor Dewey read the Arbor Day Proclamation, usually performed on Berwyn Heights Day. On a motion by MPT Kulpa-Eddy, and second by CM Sweep, the Proclamation was approved 5 to 0.

4. Presentation

Mayor Dewey welcomed Robert Diss with Lindsey & Associates to review the Town's FY 2020 audited financial statements. Mr. Diss gave an overview of the audit report. He said the Town received a clean opinion, giving assurance that the financial statements are not materially misstated. The Management Discussion & Analysis, authored by the Town Manager and Treasurer, gives an overview of the Town's finances for the year. It includes a table comparing FY 2020 to FY 2019 outcomes. The report includes two sets of financial statements required by the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB). The first set takes long term assets and liabilities into account and shows an increase in equity of \$434,000. The second set of financial statements only takes current assets and liabilities into account and shows the Town increased its fund balance by \$153,000.

Mr. Diss highlighted several Auditors' Notes pertaining to Cash & Investments, Property Taxes, Capital Assets and the Town's participation in the Maryland State Retirement Plan. Discussing the statements comparing budgeted versus actual revenues and expenditures, he noted that the Town uses reserves to balance its budget, and budgets on a "non-GAAP basis."

Mayor Dewey thanked Mr. Diss for his presentation and advised that the audit report and other background documentation are available on the Town's website. MPT Kulpa-Eddy requested a bound copy of the report, which Mr. Diss will provide. MPT Kulpa-Eddy moved, and CM Brittan-Powell seconded to accept the FY 2020 Audit Report. The motion passed 5 to 0.

5. Public Hearings

FY 2022 General Fund Budget & Tax Rate: Mayor Dewey said, as part of the FY 2022 budget process, the Town engaged residents via a survey and a budget meeting. The budget to be introduced tonight is a status quo budget balanced at slightly above \$4 million and maintains the current real property tax rate of 54.5 cents per \$100 of assessed property value. TM Allen is requested to present the details of the proposed budget.

TM Allen presented an overview of the FY 2022 budget. She said the budget is built around 4 priorities identified through the public engagement process and funded as follows:

1. Condition of Streets and Sidewalks, Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety
 - \$210,000 in roadway repairs
 - \$30,000 for walkable, bikeable taskforce recommendations
2. Recreation and Parks
 - Level funding of civic organizations
 - National Night Out
 - \$205,000 Town Center improvements (bond bill)
3. Sustainability
 - Green Team funding
 - Thriving Earth Exchange tree protection program
 - Campus Community Connection program
 - Balanced budget
 - \$16,000 Urban Forest budget
 - Composting program continuation
4. Effective Communication
 - Development of communications policy
 - Translation service by BHPD clerk
 - Bulletin mailed to households

- E-newsletter published twice a month

TM Allen continued that the proposed budget maintains previous real and personal property tax rates, as well as the recycling fee of \$90 per household. Important changes on the expense side of the ledger include a 14% increase in health insurance premiums that required making adjustments in other areas, COLA and merit pay increases for employees, and needed replacement of Public Works and Police vehicles that were deferred due to the pandemic.

The Town continues to effectively manage its financial, staff and capital resources. The Town's most important resource, its employees, are supported through appropriate compensation and training, which helps assure they can deliver the best possible service to the residents. To date, the COVID-19 pandemic has had no significant impact on the budget, as property values and tax revenues have remained steady. The Town has held off on major purchases, continues to avoid debt financing and maintains a healthy fund balance to be able to mitigate any pandemic-related setbacks.

TM Allen said the Town's current General Fund balance stands at \$2.5 million which she expects not to be significantly different by the end of the fiscal year. She then detailed the Town's revenue sources, departmental expenditures and capital projects, as projected for FY 2022. In sum, the FY 2022 budget will be slightly higher (3.2%) than last year's, mainly due to the State bond bill the Town received.

In response to MPT Kulpa-Eddy, TM Allen said she projects income tax receipts to increase by \$25,000 based on past revenue patterns. While the pandemic has changed the timing of payments, she believes the Town will receive a substantial income tax disbursement at year's end.

Clerk Harper read Ordinance 183 adopting the FY 2022 General Fund budget, and Mayor Dewey opened the public hearing.

Joan Hayden, Seminole Street, asked via email how she can obtain a copy of the budget. Mayor Dewey replied it is posted on the Town website with the agenda packet.

Alex Lopatka, Berwyn Road, asked via Zoom how the 14% health premium increase was absorbed. TM Allen replied that she had estimated a 10% increase in health insurance cost. The additional 4% was made up from reductions in the Administration capital equipment line item and miscellaneous benefits, and by shifting the Senior Center stove purchase to the bond bill.

With no further comments, CM Sweep moved and CM Papanikolas seconded to hold the record open for further comments. The motion passed 5 to 0.

FY 2022 Public Safety Taxing District Budget: Mayor Dewey said this budget supports the cost of one police officer and outfitting with a special tax levied on the Town's commercial and industrial district. TM Allen explained that the special public safety tax is expected to raise approximately \$88,000 of which \$86,700 will be expended for the police officer dedicated to the commercial district. No increase in the tax rate is proposed. A meeting with the Commercial District Management Authority (CDMA) is being scheduled to receive approval for this budget.

Clerk Harper read a summary of Ordinance 184 adopting the Public Safety Taxing District Budget. In response to MPT Kulpa-Eddy, TM Allen said the CDMA meeting will be noticed and Council provided an agenda.

Mayor Dewey opened the public hearing. There were no comments. CM Papanikolas moved and CM Sweep seconded to hold the record open for further comments. The motion passed 5 to 0.

6. Consent Agenda

CM Sweep moved and MPT Kulpa-Eddy seconded to approve the consent agenda. The motion passed 5 to 0.

7. Mayor's Report

Mayor Dewey thanked TM Allen and Treasurer Lightfield for their hard work on the budget, complicated by the pandemic and the departure of the previous Treasurer.

Ethics Commission Appointment

Mayor Dewey said Ordinance 110 provides for the Mayor to appoint a 3-member Ethics Commission, which reviews financial disclosures and any ethics complaints that might be received, for a 2-year term. The Town was fortunate to receive several applications from well-qualified candidates. From these she chose Taylor Hahn, Diane Beckam and Alex Lopatka to be sworn in at the May Town meeting. Mr. Hahn and Mr. Lopatka thanked Mayor Dewey for nominating them and said they are looking forward to serving on the Commission.

Mayor Dewey further reported the Town has received a bond bill to undertake some much-needed Town Center improvements, foremost the replacement of the elevator. The vaccination program has progressed to a point where all adults are now eligible to be vaccinated. The newly opened Greenbelt Station site is run by FEMA, but appointments must be made through the State's registration system. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) has paused the distribution of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine due to rare complications people have experienced.

Mayor Dewey continued that she has met with the Fire Department to discuss facility issues, had a monthly call with Councilmember Glaros about County matters, and attended Neighborhood Watch and Recreation Council meetings. Having served on the MML Legislative Committee, she has had the opportunity to closely follow legislation MML had identified as priorities. The Legislature passed 2 bills related to support broadband availability: An MML sponsored HUR bill failed as did Senator Pinsky's Climate Solutions Now Act. A bill mandating that municipalities hold a special election whenever a Council vacancy occurs also failed, which allows municipalities to continue to follow their existing procedures for filling vacancies.

8. Councilmember Reports

MPT Kulpa-Eddy said that residents' real property tax bills will be increasing by an average of \$150 this year due to rising assessments. The Town's proposed budget does not adopt a constant yield tax rate to prevent tax bills from rising. Unlike in previous years, she has not heard any comments about this and wanted residents to be aware of it.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy commended the Code and Public Works Department for improvements made to their monthly reports. She also announced that Metro is phasing out their old Smart Trip cards which can be cashed in according to a process described on Metro's website. County Councilmember Glaros will hold a virtual Town Hall meeting on April 19, at which the County's budget will be discussed. County Executive Alsobrooks and the heads of County agencies will be present to respond to constituents' questions.

CM Papanikolas thanked everyone who applied to serve on the Ethics Commission. He is glad that everyone is now eligible to get vaccinated and that the process is easy. Much of the financial information provided by the Administration Department has already been discussed as part of the budget hearings.

CM Brittan-Powell seconded MPT Kulpa-Eddy's commendation regarding the Code Compliance report. He noted that the report shows rental license revenue to be down because rental activity declined during the pandemic.

CM Sweep reported that the street sweeper will not be in Town until the first week of May. The Public Works building finally had the soffits repaired.

9. Committee Reports

Education Advisory Committee: MPT Kulpa-Eddy reported that the BHEAC completed the education grant application form and is now drafting a grant submission and review process. Prince George's County Public Schools have reopened, and some students are back in school. The BHEAC is also supporting an educational summer camp program at the Community Center for which scholarships will be available.

Green Team: Mayor Dewey reported that the Green Team at its last meeting talked at length about the cicadas that are about to emerge and how to protect young trees from them. The Green Team also commented on environmental bills before the Legislature this session and the Pepco filing on street light upgrades. The adopt-a-block litter program is going well and has the potential of removing more litter from Town streets than the monthly litter pickup. Also discussed were the Bee City USA application and the community garden. Trees of Distinction nominations are due at the end of April. Trees may be renominated, and forms should be submitted with a photo to Mayor Dewey.

Historical Committee: BHHC Chair Debby Steele Snyder reported that the Historical Committee has drafted a disclaimer for the Duncanson Avenue marker, which has been sent to the Council for review. Plans for a Berwyn Heights Day scavenger hunt have been revised. The Committee will instead feature 2 quiz-type questions on its page in the Bulletin each month with answers provided the following month. The Committee also sent a letter to the editor of College Park Here & Now, which corrected a number of inaccuracies in an article about Berwyn Heights history.

CM Sweep thanked the Committee for spending the time to craft the explanatory language for the Duncanson marker.

Neighborhood Watch/ Emergency Preparedness: Mayor Dewey said at its last meeting the Committee discussed the emergency trailer and where it should focus its work. MPT Kulpa-Eddy added the Committee elected new officers. Joan Hayden and Randy Fortwengler will be co-chairs and Georgina Dodge will serve as Secretary. The Committee plans to review its bylaws and other guidance documents to clarify its responsibilities. A trailer inventory is planned for warmer weather.

Recreation Council: Recreation Council President Susan Jones announced that a virtual Trivia Night is planned for April 23. Berwyn Heights Day planning continues. Activities include a scavenger hunt featuring places and amenities in the Town participants can identify, as well as a house decorating contest and a car parade, headed by BHPD and the Volunteer Fire Department, that will go to every street in Town. Last year's virtual concerts will be replayed on BHTV and YouTube throughout the

afternoon. Special Berwyn Heights Day T-shirts have been ordered with some to spare should anyone else want one.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy encouraged residents to check out the e-newsletter for a jigsaw puzzle that is based on pictures of previous Berwyn Heights Day activities. Feedback forms for the Neighbor-to-Neighbor program have been sent to participants and should be returned to TM Allen by April 18.

Ms. Jones said the Recreation Council will wait to make a determination about whether or not to hold a Town-wide yard sale until the COVID situation is clearer. Lastly, she noted that she has seen BHPD enforcing stop sign violations, which seems to persuade some bicyclists to come to a halt.

10. Old Business

Pepco Comment Letter: Mayor Dewey said MPT Kulpa-Eddy and TM Allen have worked on drafting a comment letter for Pepco's multi-year plan regarding proposed street light upgrades. It lists the Town's priorities with respect to this project that were identified in several Council discussions.

TM Allen read the letter regarding Pepco's October 2020 filing with Maryland's Public Service Commission (PSC case number 9655) into the record. It states, while the Town is generally supportive of the modernization of the grid and LED lighting, the PSC is requested to ensure:

- Lighting project complies with guidance from the American Medical Association and the International Dark Sky Association;
- Pepco works in partnership with municipalities to meet lighting needs during implementation;
- Fully shielded and warm lighting options are available where requested;
- The cost borne by local governments for the project is fair across the project area;
- Pepco provides more in-depth rate tables enabling lay persons to understand the proposed rate increases. The Town supports the rate sunset request made by the Town of Kensington;
- Pepco produces written information about the project in English and Spanish; and
- Smart node data is made available to the public.

The letter is prepared for Mayor Dewey's signature but can be adjusted to have all Councilmembers sign. MPT Kulpa-Eddy suggested to leave it as is, since the letter is written on behalf of the Council. MPT Kulpa-Eddy moved, and CM Sweep seconded to approve the letter. The motion passed 5 to 0.

11. New Business

Ordinance 183 – 1st Reading & Introduction of FY 2022 General Fund Budget: Mayor Dewey said the Ordinance was read and discussed during the public hearing portion of the meeting and invited additional comments. TM Allen noted that since the budget was last presented, the remaining balance of the emergency trailer reserve had been added to the Police Department budget. The funds will be used for purchasing decals and a propane generator for the emergency trailer.

CM Papanikolas moved, and CM Sweep seconded to introduce the FY 2022 budget. The motion was approved 5 to 0. (CM Brittan Powell's vote was recorded with delay due to technical difficulties)

Ordinance 184 – 1st Reading & Introduction of FY 2022 Public Safety Taxing District Budget: Mayor Dewey invited additional comments on the PSTD budget. There were none.

CM Sweep moved and CM Papanikolas seconded to introduce the PSTD budget. The motion passed 5 to 0.

Darryll Pines, UMD President Congratulations Letter: Mayor Dewey said, on a suggestion by CM Sweep, the Council agreed to send a letter congratulating Darryll Pines on his inauguration as the 34th President of the University of Maryland. CM Sweep moved and CM Papanikolas seconded to approve the letter as is. The motion passed 5 to 0. The letter will be signed by all Councilmembers.

Four Cities Agenda Items: Mayor Dewey said that next Four Cities Coalition meeting will take place virtually on April 22, hosted by Greenbelt, and asked if Councilmembers have any agenda items to suggest. Council had planned to submit the American Rescue Plan Act funding for discussion, but the US Treasury Department has not yet issued guidance on the use of these funds.

The Pepco and Maglev comment letters were proposed for the agenda. CM Sweep said the Greenbelt Road working group will make a presentation at the end of the meeting.

12. Resident and Community Comments

In response to CM Sweep, TM Allen confirmed that WSSC is required to repave the roads from curb to curb after completing their pipe replacement project on Edmonston Road and Goucher Drive. The Town is working with WSSC to install new underdrains to improve stormwater drainage in some sections before the final pavement is applied.

Joan Hayden, Seminole Street, commented by email that she cannot access the supporting budget documents on the Town website. Clerk Harper said the webhosting vendor was experiencing some technical difficulties today. Mayor Dewey said she can forward the budget to anyone requesting it.

On a motion by CM Sweep and second by MPT Kulpa-Eddy, the meeting was adjourned at 8:48 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper*, Town Clerk